Post 7/4/67

Appeals to Courts Seen Under Information Law

United Press International

The freedom of information law goes into effect today with predictions that only the courts will determine whether the Government's traditional habit of secrecy about its affairs can be broken.

As one official put it, "no muckraker's paradise is going to emerge when this law becomes effective, although it will make it easier for people to see records that have been public right along."

The official, who asked not to be named, said the law's provisions for court challenge of any agency that withholds a document "will surely be the way that the impact of this law is determined."

That view is shared by many information officers in executive-branch agencies, all of which are affected by the law. Attorney General Ramsey Clark also feels such will be the case.

Clark said in a memorandum to the agencies that there was "room for more than one interpretation" of the law's provisions and that "definitive answers may have to await court rulings."

The law, signed by President Johnson July 4, 1966, permits anyone to ask to see specific records held by a Federal agency, and to challenge in court any withholding of a document.

Under such challenge, the burden of justifying a decision to withhold a document lies on the agency involved.